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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHER IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

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The teacher is as human, often as intelligent and able, and not infrequently possesses equally as good power of leadership and organization, as the college professor, superintendent, principal, or supervisor, who are more conspicuous on the platform of educational gatherings, more prominent on the pages of educational magazines, and more frequently called upon to lead educational conferences. Do we, as school heads and supervisors, utilize this wonderful mass of resources as we should? I believe we do not. Teachers are worth much more to us than we have realized. Unfortunately they have been led to feel that they are followers and subservient to the will of higher authority, and to take things as a matter of course; and the majority of teachers are contented with this order of things, too. We should get much more out of teachers than we do. I do not mean more of the routine drudgery, but more in the way of organization of the whole school work. Make the teachers business partners and give them the privilege of sharing the profits.

The superintendent who is able to bring out from his corps of principals the best there is in them, and the principal who is able to develop the resources within his teaching force, are the ones who make the greatest educational progress. Many a splendid teaching force has undoubtedly failed to accomplish things either through the very personal ambitions of superior officers or through the lack of ability to utilize the forces that may be found within the teaching body. I say bring the

teacher to the front; give her greater responsibilities in the shaping of our work. She is capable of carrying off the responsibilities imposed upon her, but—and here is where we may fail—give her recognition. Let it be *our* work, not my work; yes, and *her* work; and call her by name as opportunities present themselves.

There are many ways in which teachers may be enlisted in active service. First, let them know that something is really expected of them besides doing the endless amount of clerical work accurately, and following dictated methods and courses of study well, and guiding and directing classroom discipline without friction. Frequently ask teachers' opinions. Encourage them to "try out." Permit them to suggest. The results of their findings through experience are worth far more than anything that can be copied from some other city or compiled by superintendents and principals who have framed the work from theory, largely. Ask a teacher to lead a conference on a matter affecting the school as a whole. Take her into your confidence in the administration of the building. How many teachers would dare approach the principal or superintendent and tell him in a friendly way that they thought he was pursuing a poor plan, and suggest a different course? I say dare, because they are not supposed to. Many teachers have little or no interest in the school's progress as a whole; the sharing of interests and responsibilities will break down such barriers and apparent indifference. Give the teacher every opportunity to criticize and advise on every feature of school work—constructive criticism, of course, and advice that emanates from genuine interest. No principal is infallible. He makes many mistakes; the teachers see them. Do we ever think of that?

To get criticisms and suggestions the principal must ask for them. The correct spirit of active co-operation must be worked up. Frequent conferences with individual teachers

and groups of teachers are advised. I say conferences, a term which means more to me than the much-despised term "teachers' meetings." The conference puts all concerned on an equal footing; the principal or teacher may be the leader, not the dictator. Confidential questionnaires have a place. Following are some questions which have been advanced with effective results:

Can you suggest an improvement in our building organization?

Can you suggest a better arrangement of programs?

Can you suggest an improvement in the opening program, the dismissals, or the passing of lines?

What have you to suggest in connection with our assembly work?

What recommendations on the courses of study have you to make?

Do you feel that you are making good progress with your classes? If not, what appears to obstruct the progress? Any questions or suggestions?

Name some feature of our school work that you think should be discussed at our next conference of teachers.

In order that replies to such questions shall be of real value, teachers must have genuine confidence in the questioner and be absolutely frank themselves.

One naturally looks to the superintendent, principal, and supervisors as superiors in the teaching force. The superintendent and principal are usually in these offices because of marked natural aptitudes in the way of leadership, executive ability, etc., but the superiority is often overemphasized and misunderstood, I believe. The supervisor of drawing is usually an artist, and specially trained in his line. The supervisor of music is skilled in his adopted profession. The same should be true of all supervisors. There should be these marked qualifications if they are properly and profitably to fulfil the function of their offices. They should be so skilled in their respective fields that teachers naturally look to them for help and guidance. Nothing can be more unfortunate and detrimental to real progress than a feeling on the part of teachers that they

are following a dictation, arbitrary and unqualified; especially deplorable are the conditions when teachers sense an unsympathetic attitude, and often an apparent inefficiency. Too often do supervising officers assume such superiority that they defeat their own ends. If one finds among his teachers—and he will find many—those who have marked qualifications along his line, why not confer with them and get their ideas, and let them know that he is glad of suggestions?

Many executive and administrative qualities lie dormant within the teaching force; much artistic ability is wasted in copying; often musical talent and the ability to lead musically are stifled by arbitrary dictum. The most successful superintendent or principal in the country will frankly admit, if pressed to make such an admission, that some of his teachers can do a much better job in a model teaching exercise than he can do. I cannot see that it is anything to be ashamed of, either. The teacher who is in the work every day, and is a real live teacher, should be able to do many things better than her superintendent or principal. If a teacher can do a thing better than her superior officer, tell her so; encourage her in her talents. On the other hand, the supervisor should be able to do many things better than a large majority of those whom he supervises; otherwise he is not entitled to the office which honors him. We need supervisors in our schools; we need all we can get, but not because of inefficiency on the part of teachers, or because teachers cannot be trusted and need watching, but to harmonize, to synchronize, direct, lead, and inspire. Every teacher is glad to follow, better still, to work with *real leaders*. Teachers will work just as faithfully, but more effectively and more efficiently, if their natural talents and social tendencies are allowed greater freedom than is usually accorded them.